

Passenger Rail Task Force

RALEIGH CITY COUNCIL

February 20, 2012

Mayor Nancy McFarlane
Raleigh City Council
Raleigh, North Carolina

Dear Mayor McFarlane and Councilors:

The Passenger Rail Task Force (PRTF) recommends endorsement of the four Raleigh commuter rail stops proposed in the Triangle Transit commuter rail system (Southeast Raleigh; downtown Raleigh; NCSU; and West Raleigh) with the stipulations detailed in this letter.

We also recommend that a special events commuter rail station be co-located with Amtrak at the State Fairgrounds.

COMMUTER RAIL SYSTEM OVERVIEW

At its January 23, 2012 meeting the Passenger Rail Task Force received a comprehensive presentation on the Alternative Analysis for the regional commuter rail system component of the Wake County Transit Plan from Jonathan Parker of Triangle Transit. Mr. Parker explained that the commuter rail system will be operated using either diesel locomotive or diesel multiple unit train cars and would run 37 miles between Greenfield Parkway in Garner and West Durham. The commuter rail system is planned to have a total 12 stations, 4 of which would be within the Raleigh city limits, with an average distance of 3.1 miles between stations. The service plan includes 30-minute train service during AM and PM Peak and 60-minute service during off peak hours. The projected ridership for the entire system is 6,900 passengers per day, and the NCSU and Downtown Raleigh stations are expected to generate the highest ridership demand within Wake County.

Mr. Parker indicated that Triangle Transit is coordinating with freight rail operators to determine their needs and potential partnerships to enhance both freight service and passenger rail service in the corridor. There is a need to construct additional rail sidings in order to offer more frequent commuter rail service within the rail corridor. The estimated cost to construct the system is \$650 million (2011 dollars), and annual operating costs are estimated at \$11 million (2011 dollars). Mr. Parker provided a tentative project schedule which included the adoption of the Locally Preferred Alternative in February by CAMPO, TTA, and DCHC; a Wake County vote on a half cent sales tax referendum for transit in November; and EIS and preliminary engineering 2013-2016. If these items occur on schedule, the system could be operational by 2019.

Mr. Parker provided detailed information, including ridership forecasts, for the four proposed Raleigh commuter rail station locations:

- (1) Southeast Raleigh (vicinity of Hammond Road and Rush Street)
- (2) Downtown Raleigh (Raleigh Train Station, known as the Viaduct Building)
- (3) NCSU campus (just east of Dan Allen Drive)
- (4) West Raleigh (vicinity of Corporate Center Drive)

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NCSU STATION LOCATION

At the same January 23 meeting, representatives from North Carolina State University were on hand to discuss the NCSU Commuter Rail station location. Mr. Skolnicki of NCSU provided an overview of the university's consideration of a proposed commuter rail station location and its relationship to the campus. NCSU stated that the university's ongoing evaluation of possible sites for a campus commuter rail station is based on four criteria:

- (1) Pedestrian access;
- (2) Multi-modal access (principally bus connections);
- (3) Space; and
- (4) Environmental issues.

However, Mr. Skolnicki did not elaborate on how those four criteria are defined or what progress has been made so far on the evaluation. He informed the Task Force that NCSU is not prepared to commit on the exact location of the station prior to Triangle Transit's EIS, but is considering a number of locations with the goal of providing connections to other modes. Mr. Skolnicki stated that some of the issues with the current suggested location east of Dan Allen Drive include potential impacts to vehicular movement patterns on Yarborough Street, difficulty with connections to the Wolfline service, and close proximity to established (campus) residential areas.

Mr. Skolnicki said that NCSU plans to examine the placement of a commuter rail station using the four criteria outlined above to determine a location that is optimal for access and transfers for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and motorists, and adequately serves the main campus while allowing for connections to Centennial Campus. The station could potentially be shifted to west of Dan Allen Drive and still link to the core areas of campus for students, faculty, and staff. NCSU is considering potential station locations generally between Pullen Road and Gorman Street. Mr. Skolnicki offered that the ultimate decision on the exact location will be informed by the NCSU Master Plan and Transit Mobility Plan as well as the platform and station requirements, and that NCSU will continue to work with Triangle Transit and other regional partners as the plan evolves.

Since NCSU is projected to be primarily a destination station for commuter rail (and later, light rail) passengers, no parking facilities are required.

SOUTHEAST RALEIGH STATION LOCATION

At its February 21, 2012 meeting the Passenger Rail Task Force received detailed and thorough briefings from Jonathan Parker of Triangle Transit, Roberta Fox of the Urban Design Center, and Eric Lamb on the strengths and challenges of the proposed Southeast Raleigh commuter rail station location near Rush Street and Hammond Road.

The PRTF learned that track curvature in the immediate area coupled with the need for station tracks to be tangent create engineering challenges, but locating a station in the vicinity is possible.

A station with convenient access to Hammond Road would link easily to Interstate 40 and to nearby employment centers, such as Cargill, the First Citizens Bank customer service center, and the Progress Energy call center.

Adequate land adjacent to this station location will be required for parking facilities for park-and-ride customers who will use the station to travel to and from work.

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DOWNTOWN RALEIGH STATION LOCATION

The Raleigh Train Station, like the NCSU station, is envisioned to be primarily a destination station and therefore has little or no parking specifically to support commuter rail customers.

WEST RALEIGH STATION LOCATION

The West Raleigh station near Corporate Center Drive is projected as a major park-and-ride station for commuter rail (and later, light rail) originating passengers.

SPECIAL EVENTS STATION LOCATION AT N. C. FAIRGROUNDS

If possible and practicable without disrupting normal commuter rail service, a special events CR station co-located with Amtrak at the State Fairgrounds would be popular with the public and would cost little since such a station exists already for the N. C. State Fair (http://trainweb.org/usarail/nc_fair.htm). Successful precedents exist elsewhere as well: Boston's Gillette Stadium in Foxboro has an MBTA commuter rail special events station, and the Hamburg Street light rail station in Baltimore opened as a special events station for Ravens games and other stadium events in 1998 before becoming a regular stop in 2005.

RECOMMENDATION STIPULATIONS

At our February 21, 2012 meeting the PRTF voted 8-0 to recommend that the four Raleigh stations in the Triangle Transit commuter rail system plan be endorsed, subject to the following stipulations:

1. To ensure easy access to the nearby employment centers, the Southeast Raleigh commuter rail station should be located between Interstate 40 and East Tryon Road.
2. The Southeast Raleigh commuter rail station should be located where adequate and convenient parking can be provided to accommodate park-and-ride customers and conducive to promotion of commercial development.
3. To accommodate employee and student commuter rail riders traveling to and from both the original campus and the Centennial Campus, the North Carolina State University station should be located no farther east than Pullen Road and no farther west than the immediate vicinity of Varsity Drive.

Sincerely,



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Co-chair, Passenger Rail Task Force



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Co-chair, Passenger Rail Task Force

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